

# Swindon Borough Council Child Exploitation Prevention Strategy

## 2017-2020

**It is our intent to continue to be vigilant and use local and national insight to keep children and young people within Swindon safe and protected from child sexual exploitation. We aim to mitigate the impact by improving outcomes and reducing harm for those:**

- **Vulnerable to or at risk of exploitation and**
- **Victims of exploitation**

### **1. Introduction and background**

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a crime that is not limited to any particular geography, ethnic or social background. It has destructive and far reaching consequences for victims, their families, and society. It involves young people being offered incentives (for example, food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) to participate in sexual acts. Perpetrators have power by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Identifying children and young people at risk and protecting them from sexual exploitation in Swindon is a collective, multi-agency responsibility.

Working with safeguarding partners, our aims include:

1. Prevention, awareness raising and public confidence
2. Early identification and protection
3. Bringing perpetrators to justice
4. Intervention and support to young people and their families
5. Intelligence gathering and performance monitoring.

The Council developed a Strategy and Action Plan (endorsed by Cabinet in February 2015), to support and enhance the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board around preventing Child Sexual Exploitation. Local authorities cannot tackle the issue in isolation and the support of the police and health service and the full commitment of all statutory agencies, the voluntary sector, schools and the wider community is critical. CSE is not limited to a particular geography and there is no single model of perpetration and so it must be recognised as a national problem.

Since launching the Council CSE strategy, there has been a great deal of activity undertaken and significant improvements have been made in understanding and recognising CSE within Swindon Children's Services and the wider Council. By working closely with partners through the Safeguarding Children Board, the Council has undertaken work to ensure that all professionals are fully aware of the risks of CSE and know what to do if they have concerns. Successful delivery of the Council CSE Action Plan has achieved a number of positive outcomes, but it is clear there is still more to do. Some key achievements include:

- The creation the Multi-Agency OPAL Team in May 2016. The team are co-located and consists of workers from the Social Care, police, Youth Engagement and Education Welfare. The team work directly with children who are at risk of CSE or who have been sexually exploited.
- Improved awareness of CSE highlighted through the recent LSCB survey of frontline practitioners from across the partnership. 1,179 practitioners responded, of which 98% reported they had a good understanding of CSE and 85% confirming that they had received CSE training.
- The Council's Corporate Management Team have endorsed the CSE Awareness basic e-learning as mandatory for all public facing staff (mandatory CSE training was already in place for all practitioners who work with children and families).
- Training for a wider audience has been provided and financed from a successful bid to One Swindon. Those trained to date or planned to be trained have been bus company trainers, leisure Centre staff, Hotel staff, CCTV operators and housing maintenance staff.
- Additional training has been developed and managed by the Council to enhance practitioner's skills and practice in working with children (including children with learning disabilities) and parents.
- Swindon's Multi-Agency Risk Panel (MARF) has been pivotal in both overseeing and quality assuring the work across the partnership relating to high risk CSE, Missing Children and Criminal Exploitation.

It is now time to refresh the Council CSE Strategy and Delivery Plan to ensure their fitness for purpose.

## **2. The purpose of the CSE strategy is to:**

1. To help identify those children at risk and to protect them from sexual exploitation.
2. To ensure we work collaboratively both within the council and across the partnership when responding to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Swindon.
3. To ensure there is a clear and consistent approach to preventing CSE, as well as identifying and supporting those who are at risk of being targeted for CSE.
4. To prevent exploitation of children by being better prepared to identify risky situations and to identify adults that perpetrate.
5. To be ready to support children when disclosures are made, take steps to protect the children from the perpetrator, and support the family to keep children safe.
6. To ensure perpetrator activity is disrupted or brought to justice.
7. To provide a co-ordinated approach which ensures children who are victims of CSE are able to get the right support to help them recover from their experience, and that they are able to continue in education and are supported to move forward with their lives.

### 3. Definition

The Government recently consulted to determine a simplified and statutory definition of CSE. Although a new definition has yet to be published, the latest working definition is:

*‘Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse where children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults. In some cases, young people are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection or status. Consent cannot be given, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them. Child sexual exploitation doesn’t always involve physical contact and can happen online. A significant number of children who are victims of sexual exploitation go missing from home, care and education at some point.’*

### 4. Key principles

Drawing on the body of evidence, the following six key principles have been identified as being central to effectively understanding and addressing CSE. These principles will be applied by the Council in pursuit of delivering this strategy and associated actions:

- Children’s needs must be at the centre of what we do
- CSE is complex; therefore the response cannot be simple or linear
- No agency can address CSE in isolation; collaboration is essential
- Knowledge is crucial
- Communities and families are valuable assets, and may also need support
- Effective services require resilient practitioners

### 5. Strategy Objectives

The main objectives of the Council’s CSE strategy are to:

- Ensure Swindon Council has clear guidance for preventative education and early identification for those children at risk or at potential risk of CSE, and for safeguarding children who are currently experiencing/ or are at risk of being sexually exploited.
- Share skills and intelligence to ensure effective action can be taken against those intent on abusing and exploiting children in this way
- Support the delivery of the Council’s Corporate Pledge 4: the most vulnerable children are protected from exploitation.
- Take an active role in the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board to ensure that a coordinated approach across all agencies is taken when considering the risk level of children who may be exploited

- To effectively link with the other strategies to ensure children and families experiencing exploitation receive joined up and seamless services e.g. Youth Offending Strategy, Domestic Abuse Strategy and LSCB CSE and Missing Strategy
- Continue to raise awareness amongst other professionals and members of the public, including parents and relevant businesses.

## **6. National overview of CSE**

The thematic inspections on CSE in 2014 suggest that children at risk of exploitation, or subject to it, are now better supported. Preventative work plays a key role in managing the risks of CSE especially around raising awareness in local communities. Schools also have a critical role in helping children and young people recognise the signs and symptoms of grooming and understand what healthy relationships look like. One of the challenges Local authorities face is their inability to instruct or directly influence schools to deliver these vital life lessons to their pupils. Evidence also indicates too many frontline health services have insufficient resources to appropriately deal with CSE.

Perpetration models are becoming more sophisticated, and are increasingly enabled by technology and with closer links to wider criminal networks and activities. Some areas are beginning to map perpetration profiles and trends locally to help target resources more effectively.

The ultimate goal is to stop abuse and prevent children from going missing in the first place. Hearing from victims and their families to strengthen how we respond to and support those at risk is central to this.

Vulnerability of a young person can lead to increased risk of CSE. The key national findings relating to vulnerability and signs of exploitation will be actively shared with staff who are best placed to recognise the signs:

## **7. National Key messages include:**

- Previously CSE interventions solely focussed on victims. Later research has identified the importance of pursuing offenders who often target multiple victims. The aim is to prosecute offenders however, it is acknowledged that obtaining a criminal conviction due to challenges of children providing evidence in court means alternative disruption strategies need to be sought and implemented.
- CSE is everyone's business
- There are clear links between missing children, CSE and Criminal Exploitation
- Practitioners with additional specialist skills are required to provide intense and flexible interventions for those children who are victims of CSE
- Children with learning disabilities and young boys are under-represented in the CSE cohort.

- Children who are uncertain about their sexuality are particularly vulnerable to CSE.

## 8. Local Overview of CSE

Swindon Council's approach to tackling CSE focusses on Prevention, Protection and Pursuit. Snapshots of the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation (CSE) within Swindon is regularly produced and reviewed to assess progress and inform future priorities. The CSE profile for Swindon based on the latest available data is provided below:

### 8.1 Young people

There are at any one time approx. 60 children identified as being at risk of CSE. With approx. 10-15 newly identified cases each quarter. Trend analysis highlighted a peak in CSE referrals earlier this year via Swindon MASH but this was identified as the result of better awareness rather than an increase in activity. Having a centrally co-located team (OPAL) has enhanced the sharing of CSE intelligence ensuring children at risk or victims of CSE are supported more effectively with improved communication and information sharing across the partnership. 28 of the children identified at the highest level of risk (serious) are receiving intervention and support from Swindon's multi-agency Team OPAL.

The age range of the CSE cohort starts at 12 years up to 18 years. The most prevalent age groups are 15 years (28%) and 16 years (23%), closely followed by 18 year olds (18%). More work is needed with schools to support early identification. Raising awareness to recognise risks and vulnerabilities in primary school children will support identification and intervention pre transition to secondary school.

The majority of children were identified as 'white'. It is recognised that minority ethnic groups are possibly under-represented in the Swindon CSE cohort.

Less than 10% of the cohort is male. We need to understand why there are significantly lower numbers of young males than females in the CSE cohort and ensure this knowledge is embedded into practice so that young males are appropriately identified. Swindon MARP data has identified that boys are being referred for Criminal Exploitation rather than CSE, whereas the girls are more likely to be referred for CSE even if the concerns are about Criminal Exploitation.

Over two thirds of the cohort (who had school attendance recorded) had less than 90% attendance. The dedicated Education Welfare Officer within the OPAL Team continues to work with schools to encourage them to adopt behaviour strategies to avoid exclusions and help children missing from education to return to school.

From the available missing children's data it is evident that episodes of missing (from home or care) continue to indicate an increased risk of CSE. A review of the social care status shows that young people identified as being at risk of CSE are receiving a service or intervention dependent on their level of need with early help, child in need, child protection and looked after children care plans being used.

## 8.2 Perpetrators

In 2015 there were 51 reported sexual offences within Swindon. This is an increase from 2014 but police advise us that this is due to improved data collection. The average age of the offenders was 18 years and there were five repeat offenders (committing more than one offence). Four of the offenders had been identified by Wiltshire Police as being known to pose a continuing risk. The majority of the offenders were White British.

The majority of CSE offending in Swindon is carried out by lone offenders striking up inappropriate relationships with vulnerable children or acting opportunistically. Currently there is no evidence of gang related CSE in Swindon. However, there are concerns related to Dangerous Drug Networks (sometimes called 'County Lines') and children being criminally exploited by this. There are fears that this activity could lead to sexual exploitation.

The focus over the last 18 months has been on pursuing and disrupting perpetrator activity. Child abduction Warning Notices have been used to disrupt as well as an increase use of Civil Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (previously known as Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts).

Partners continue to gather intelligence around locations of concern, where young people who frequent them may be at increased risk of CSE.

## 8.4 Impact and outcomes

Children receiving a service from the OPAL were asked their views on the support they received in relation to CSE. To date, feedback has been positive and relates to improved family life, having safer sex and having the opportunity to talk through things.

Positive outcomes have also been identified by practitioners who have supported this cohort of children in Swindon with latest data showing: exploitation ceasing; improved mental health and wellbeing; increased ability to express feelings; reduced consumption of substance/alcohol; return to education; and less children going missing.

## 8.5 Staff

A survey led by LSCB confirmed the majority of professionals were aware of the signs and symptoms of CSE.

## 9. **Key priorities for 2017-2020**

Protecting children from harm is one of the most important things the Council does, but we cannot stamp out CSE without the help of the wider community. The Council's CSE strategy developed in 2015 is being updated to ensure it is fit for purpose going forward. Insight gained from the lessons learned from the previous two years, as well as ongoing intelligence from local and national risk profiles and audits have been used to inform the Council's future priorities and activities for 2017 to 2020. The strategy

aims to prevent, identify and support those children and young people who are at risk or have experienced CSE, as well as improve action against perpetrators through disruption and prosecution. Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse, and the core purpose of this strategy is to protect the welfare of children at risk.

Over the next three years we will continue to build on the good work already taking place within Swindon Council around exploitation. It is important that the Council's CSE Strategy and Action Plan continue to be 'live' documents and subject to regular scrutiny and potential amendment. The documents will need to align to emerging national and local issues particularly in relation to the wider exploitation strategy (covering CSE, Missing, Criminal Exploitation, Trafficking, and Online Exploitation) in development by the LSCB.

Early identification is critical if we are to continue to reduce the risk of CSE in Swindon. The CSE Partnership Profiles have provided a clear understanding of the nature and extent of child exploitation in Swindon, however, it is recognised that making them broader will support greater local insight into child exploitation. An ongoing understanding of the profile of perpetrators in the area will also help ensure local resources are effectively targeted to prosecute or disrupt offenders. Swindon's Multi-agency Risk Panel (MARF) has identified the links between exploitation and a child missing from home, education and care, therefore ongoing work with schools is a priority. Areas for further development which remain a challenge include transition for 18 year olds, and better identification and support for boys, minority ethnic children and children with a learning disability at risk of CSE.

The priorities for Swindon Council's child sexual exploitation strategy are highlighted below and will be implemented through a robust action plan. By working closely with partners Swindon Council will:

### **Prevent CSE by creating an environment that does not tolerate CSE**

- Review the membership of the Council's CSE working group so it is set at senior officer level to provide strategic overview and have the authority to drive change.
- For the Council's CSE Working Group to be accountable for overseeing the development and implementation of a robust action plan to support the delivery of the Council's updated strategy
- Refresh the Council's CSE communication strategy so all council services and elected members continue to understand their role in providing preventative interventions and are equipped and supported to do so
- Engage and provide information to the wider Swindon communities to support them in recognising CSE and understanding what to do if CSE is identified
- Support further CSE awareness raising with the night time economy in Swindon particularly targeting taxi drivers, door staff and hotels

- Continue to engage with schools and other community-based settings to actively promote young people's understanding of healthy relationships and to challenge cultural attitudes that can facilitate exploitation
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### **Provide protection by identifying and supporting victims**

- Work with partners to broaden the CSE data and intelligence reports to provide greater local insight into child exploitation.
- Ensure council practitioners are appropriately trained and supported to understand and work within the complex dynamics of CSE and to promote continuous improvement in services for children at risk of sexual exploitation and those who go missing from home, care or education
- Evaluate the basic e-learning CSE training
- Continue to work with schools to track and respond to children missing from education and influence schools to adopt behaviour strategies that avoid exclusions
- Ensure specialist services are adequately resourced to provide targeted interventions for high-risk young people and their parents/cares
- Ensure strategy discussions and return home interviews for Children are held in a timely manner and used at an individual and strategic level to tackle risk
- Understand how we can improve the identification of boys, children from minority ethnic background and children with a learning disability at risk of CSE, and embed this learning into local practice
- Seek and collate the views of children and parents and act on their views on an individual basis and in service design and delivery

### **Stop perpetrators by identifying them early, disrupting their activities and securing justice & convictions.**

- Work with partners to use local data on perpetrators to 'problem profile' to gain greater insight so current and emerging concerns can be pro-actively addressed



- Participate in the multi-agency perpetrator disruption meetings chaired by the police, and contribute to the development of disruption plans to prevent offending and maximise the opportunities for prosecution

## **10. Monitoring and Quality**

The strategy and the action plan will be monitored by the Council's CSE Working Group who will report to Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress, flagging good practice and any issues of potential concern or risk. The action plan will be refreshed on an annual basis.

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